

China Lake
Corrals

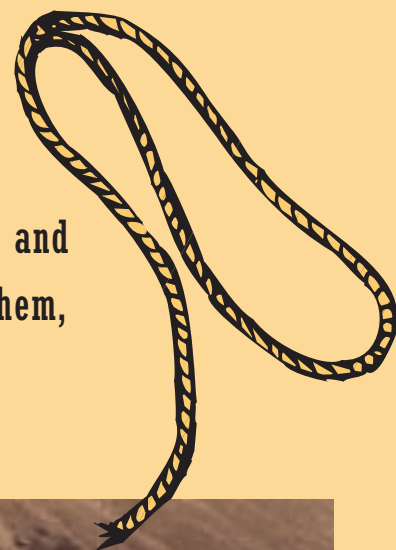


WILD HORSES

NAWS CHINA LAKE
AND THE BUREAU OF
LAND MANAGEMENT
OVERSEE WILD HORSE AND
BURRO PROGRAM



In a scene that easily could have happened in this area over 100 years ago, a group of cowboys pursues and captures a herd of wild, unsaddled horses, escorting them, driving them, into a fenced enclosure.



Though this is all happening in the modern era, it is not a tobacco advertisement—this is the Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake's wild horse and burro management program. As part of this program, NAWS China Lake has teamed up with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to manage the populations of wild horses and burros which have existed in these parts for over a century.

NAWS China Lake and the BLM signed an interagency agreement

BLM wranglers round up a wild horse on Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake land.





Get Your 'Ass' Off the Runway:
Two four-legged culprits nabbed at
Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS)
China Lake pose for their mug
shots before they are removed
and adopted out.



"Wild horses and burros out-compete indigenous animals such as the desert tortoise, bighorn sheep and the California Inyo Towhee, a sensitive bird found on Navy lands."



in August 2003 to outline their respective roles and responsibilities in the management of these wild horse and burro populations located on Naval station grounds. Though NAWS China Lake and BLM have been working together to oversee the animals' welfare for over 20 years, the recent agreement codifies the partnership and clarifies some of the gray areas, outlining the fiscal and operational responsibilities for each agency.

Wild burros were introduced to the open ranges of the Southwest desert in the late 1800s. Wild horses predated them, according to the accounts of Native Americans and early settlers. By the late 1970s, the rapid growth of the equines' populations became a noticeable problem, and an environmental impact statement (EIS) conducted by NAWS China Lake in 1981 confirmed that the animals' populations were having adverse impacts on soil, natural vegetation, water sources and native wildlife.

Hector Villalobos, BLM Field Office Manager for Ridgecrest, CA said, "The wild horses and burros out-compete indigenous animals such as the desert tortoise, bighorn sheep and the California Inyo Towhee, a sensitive bird found on Navy lands. And when a species over-grazes an area, all animals in the ecosystem suffer."

"The public does not want these symbols of the Wild West to be in poor condition," Villalobos said.

In addition to the toll taken on the local environment, the horses and burros were interfering with the Naval station's operations and mission activities. There were even accidents involving Navy vehicles and burros, including more than one close call between burros and Navy aircraft.

Naval station personnel looked at the data gathered during the 1981 EIS, which listed the burros' population at approximately 5,000 and the horses' population at approximately 1,000, and made a determination—although the station could support a wild horse population numbering 168, all of the burros had to go.

NAWS China Lake eventually contracted the BLM to round up, load and transport the animals to the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Facility, where they are fed well, monitored, cared for and put-up for adoption. With the possible exception of the aid of helicopters, these round-ups are reminiscent of a scene from the old west, including cowboys—referred to in this instance as "BLM wranglers"—with cowboy hats and lassos, riding horses across dusty plains.

To date, there have been 3,450 horses and 12,125 burros removed from

NAWS China Lake and adjoining BLM lands.

CAPT Alex Hnarakis, commanding officer at NAWS China Lake, said the station and BLM will continue working together in accordance with the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. He added that the agreement "will also provide the best avenue to control increased population of wild animals on land that is used for Naval aircraft weapons' testing and training while offering an adoption program through BLM. I believe that is the most beneficial solution."

Back at the BLM ranch, the horses and burros can be adopted for \$125. In the fiscal year 2003, approximately 320 wild horses and burros were adopted from the BLM California Desert District, which includes NAWS China Lake. 🐾

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